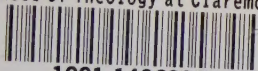


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SIX ESSAYS IN PRACTICE.

BY

R. F. HORTON, M.A.

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PREFACE.

THE following Addresses are published, not at the instance of the author, but at the request of the Publishers. They were delivered *ex tempore*, taken down by a shorthand writer, and corrected afterwards up to a somewhat low standard of at least grammatical accuracy. The author hardly likes to see under a literary guise work of his which is in no sense literary, but from the expressions of opinion which have reached him he gathers that some people are sufficiently anxious for a word of guidance on these Practical Questions to make them tolerant of the somewhat rough and unfinished form in which the counsel is given.

R. F. H.

HAMPSTEAD,

May, 1892.

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I.

THE CHRISTIAN IN BUSINESS.

THE CHRISTIAN IN BUSINESS.

“When a man’s ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.”

PROV. xvi. 7.

I APPROACH the subject of this evening —“The Christian in Business”—with a great deal of diffidence, because there is a general and a very natural impression abroad that a minister has no experience that would enable him to understand the difficulties and the temptations to which business men are exposed. But there are two considerations which encourage me to treat the subject. One of them is, that the minister’s duty is not to preach himself, or to give his own views of things, but to preach Christ and Christ’s view of things as it has been delivered to us through His Apostles. And Christ spent the greater part of His life on earth as a business man in a very humble, but yet

a useful, business—the handicraft of carpentry—and He chose as those who should communicate His truth to the world men who were one and all engaged in common industries for the greater part of their lives. The most distinguished of them, St. Paul, expressly tells us that he, all through his life, combined his handicraft of tentmaker with his Apostolic labours. Thus the message of the Gospel, whatever may be the inexperience of the modern messenger, was essentially a message from business men to business men. Humanly speaking, it emanated not from the Study or the School, but from a circle of very busy, hardworking folk, and it found its first sphere of influence not in the University and amongst the leisured classes, but in the crowded centres of industry, and among the people who were under the necessity of working hard for their bread. The other consideration which leads me to speak on the subject is, that quite possibly the voice of one who

is not immersed in business may be the very instrument by which God will help those who are. A minister has a certain detachment and independence in speaking about business, and he may be able to see certain aspects of the subject which are a little lost to those who are plunged into the vortex, and he may be able to hold up certain truths which are for business men in danger of being forgotten. And certainly if I succeed in presenting you with the will and the thought of our Divine Master, it may be more help to busy people than if I were fortunate enough to be acquainted with the details of business ways. In battles a post, however humble, is usually assigned to the standard-bearer, who cannot take part in the conflict, but who can lift up the colours after which the soldiers eagerly press. I could hope that I might to-night lift up the banner, the legend of which is the will of our Divine Lord, and that busy people, seeing it, might be

encouraged to press forward in the way of service and obedience to Him.

It happened, too, as if to redress my practical inexperience, that I lately came across the life of a business man which presents, almost to the letter, exactly what I think ought to be said on an occasion like this. It is the life of Mr. Alexander Balfour, of Liverpool, and I shall venture to give the hastiest possible sketch of his life as a little frontispiece to what I myself want to say. Mr. Balfour came from the East coast of Scotland as a boy to make his way in Liverpool, and, as is not uncommon with young men who come from that Northern country, he was determined to succeed. He spared no effort by which success in business could be secured, and, at last, as a Liverpool merchant he did succeed. Now, to appraise the manner of that success, notice these words of his partner: "Just before he entered into business for himself I remember with what earnestness he pro-

posed that we should set aside a certain percentage of our profits for religious and benevolent purposes, before any division was made among the partners." He did not confine himself to that percentage ; his wide beneficence drew upon all his resources ; but that minimum was always secured. He recognised the principle that in going into business God has the first claim on the profits. Again, when he had acquired a certain amount of capital which he considered adequate to his business obligations, some years before his death, he came to the conclusion to allow no further accumulation, but to spend all that he got as God prospered him for the promotion of Christian enterprise and social reforms. He recognised the valuable principle, that when God sends great wealth He never sends it for the steward alone. Once more, when he was quite a young man, at the age of thirty-three there occurred—it was the year 1857—a serious

commercial crisis in Liverpool, and sanguine and confident as the young partners were, they had engaged in undertakings a little beyond the margin of what was prudent. This was the cause of very great anxiety, and when he weathered the storm, he was full of self-reproach for what he considered, not an error of judgment, but a grievous sin, and ever afterwards he was tremblingly solicitous that his business obligations should never exceed what prudence dictated. Lastly, the method in which Mr. Balfour carried on his business may be inferred from the statement made, after his death, by a merchant who had dealt with him for many years. He said: "When an order was given it was carried out exactly as if he were acting for himself. Of course, I could not but stick to him." The difficulty seemed to be not to get him to treat others as he treated himself, but to get him to treat himself as he treated others. There was nothing on which he looked

with greater scorn than the principle that there is one code of conduct in business and another code of conduct for ordinary Christian life. He believed it to be imperative on the man of business to be upright and fair under all competition and in all circumstances; and a little incident is quoted. On one occasion he had made a written agreement with another merchant, but when he got back into his office it occurred to him that the agreement was a little too favourable for his own firm. He hastily despatched a clerk to the other signatory, and entreated him to cancel the engagement, because he felt it was not favourable enough to him.*

Now, it may be thought, of course, that Mr. Balfour was an exceptional man, but he was only exceptional in the way in which any of us can be exceptional—that is, he ventured always to carry his Chris-

* *Alexander Balfour : A Memoir.* By R. H. Lundie, M.A. (J. Nisbet & Co.)

tian faith and his Christian principles into the transactions of his every-day business. It is not given to us all to be as successful as he was, and to become, through the possession of large means, beneficent on a large scale, but it is given to us all to employ precisely the same principles in all our business life. What those principles were I think I can best illustrate by giving you a quotation from the diary which he kept when he was in Valparaiso. It seems almost a violation of secrecy to quote a diary, even when it is published and open to us all, but I believe he would be glad if he knew that we might be helped by his experience.

On his thirty-ninth birthday he makes this entry in his diary, and it gives us the secret of his business life :—

CONFESSION OF MY SINS.

Of youth.

Of early manhood.

Since I have known something of God's truth.

Selfishness, pride.
Worship of the creature.
Want of love.

THANKSGIVING THAT

God has manifested such patience.

He touched my heart.

He bore with me when steeped in worldliness
after naming the name of Christ.

He had compassion on me when in the land of
darkness and in the Valley of the Shadow of
Death, and has gradually brought me out into
the light.

He has not only taught me His secret, but has
solaced me with such love to my soul as I never
dreamt to have experienced. He has put me in
the position I hold, surrounded with such elements
of happiness.

SUPPLICATION THAT

He would not lead me into temptation, but
deliver me from evil, graciously subduing the
pride, covetousness, high-mindedness, and evil
tempers which dwell in my soul.

That He will grant me such grace that I shall
be led to hate what He hates and to love what
He loves.

That He will help me to deny myself as I am
required to do.

That He will bless all my relations and friends everywhere.

That He will pour out His Spirit on my own land and on my fellow-countrymen, and on natives of this land !

That He will give wisdom to all in connection with the Church, the Bible Society, and the enterprise at Lota, causing them to pursue the very conduct agreeable to His will, and that He can bless.

That He will lead me through life, so that I may live agreeably to His will, in the calling and obeying the directions He appoints. That He will prepare me for death, so that I may be ready and willing to go when He shall summon me.

That was the secret of the man's life ; and with this example of a business man before us not drawn from apostolic days, but from the period of pressure, competition and difficulty in which we live ourselves, I think we may venture to group together the peculiar difficulties to which business men are exposed, and to seek the way in which they are to be met.

There seem to be three distinct groups. *First*, there are the difficulties which come

from the mere pressure of business, occupying the mind, exhausting the faculties and deadening the spirit, so that we become conscious of being on a low level of thought and conviction. *Secondly*, there are the difficulties which come from the practices of the trade or profession in which we are engaged, practices which our conscience disapproves, but which we do not see how to avoid without retiring from business altogether. And, *thirdly*, there are the difficulties which occur to the really spiritual man, the question how he is to make his daily business life a real witness for Jesus Christ, or the problem how he is to bring his Christian character to bear upon the people whom he meets, and how he, though engaged in earthly affairs, may be the means of winning souls to his Saviour.

Now, to meet the *first group*, the difficulties which arise from the mere pressure of business, it is evident that every busi-

ness man who feels the pressure must at all costs secure *time*,—it may be by early rising and the sacrifice of sleep—it may be by using holidays when they occur, but it *must* be by the conscientious use of the one day in the week which God has given to every one of us, His Sabbath,—in order to re-charge the spiritual batteries, to re-spiritualise the depressed Christian life. The soldier who is to be long exposed in the field takes care at every opportunity to fill his pouch with fresh ammunition; a business man who is subject to the constant pressure of present-day life should hesitate to lose any opportunity of putting on “the whole armour of God.” I know that the pressure of business is often given as a reason for neglecting Christian fellowship, for neglecting opportunities of private prayer, for neglecting the approach to God in worship and united service, but as a matter of fact it is that very pressure which makes these things essential, which makes it

impossible to stand without them ; and to urge it as a reason for neglecting them is just as if the danger of the battle were urged as a reason for not visiting the armoury, and the length of the journey as a reason for not replenishing the wallet with bread. I would remind you that all through life,

Tasks in hours of insight willed,
Must be in hours of *stress* fulfilled.*

And as the hours of insight are rare for all of us, in the pressure of life we cannot afford to lose any one of them. Occasion must be diligently sought and rigorously secured when the spirit is literally brought into contact with God and when all its fading faculties are revived and its principles reinforced. I know one business man, though it is in a country town, who secures every day, at noon, an hour when he turns the key of his office and spends

* Tasks in hours of insight willed,
Must be in hours of gloom fulfilled.

M. ARNOLD.

the time in Bible reading and prayer, and the expression which he habitually wears upon his face, the peace and the joy and the helpfulness of his character, would almost tell you that he did so if you did not know it. That, I am aware, might be a counsel of perfection for business men in London, but, at any rate, men in London must try to realise the danger and face the difficulties, and make up their minds that no opportunity shall be missed of re-invigorating the spiritual life which is subject to such severe pressure. I think God is very good to overworked men. If a man is not overworked, he has to spend a great deal more time in prayer before he gets the blessing; but when a man is overworked God sends the blessing at the instance of a very short prayer. And when God comes to one of His servants in the desert and gives him a meal, the man can go upon that meal for many days, if there is no other meal to be got. God can mira-

culously sustain the spirit that has but a few moments a day to definitely seek Him. And this also may be observed, that where a man uses with all his heart the opportunities of prayer which occur to him, the pressure in daily business has a beneficial effect : it sinks him down upon God, it makes his very life settle on the foundations of the Divine power and love.

Now we must pass on to the *second group* of difficulties, which arise from the practice of the trade or profession in which we are engaged ; and these difficulties can only be met by strong measures. Perhaps we should make a distinction between those who are employed and those who are employers. A subordinate employed in a house of business cannot be held responsible for all that goes on in the house ; he can only be held responsible for what he does himself. On the other hand, the employer must be held responsible for all that goes on in

the house, if it is with his knowledge ; and though he does not stain his own hands, the stain which rests upon the hands of the subordinates who are doing his business undoubtedly spreads from the subordinate to him. We have to distinguish between those who are merely subordinates and those who are responsible for the business itself.

Now, we all know—not in detail, of course, but in general—the peculiar difficulties of the present day, difficulties which are emphasized in London, but exist all over the country, and possibly all over the world ; they arise from the curious fact that competition is no longer the competition of buyers to get, but of producers to dispose of, the things which are produced ; the rapidity in production is really the primary cause of the great difficulties of modern competitive industry. Every man is trying to sell and asking people to buy, and using methods to induce them to buy, which

always tend to trench upon the ways of simple honesty and uprightness. Now, in such a difficult world of industry as this, it is quite plain that no man, however strong, can walk securely unless he is continually fore-armed; and a young Christian should, as it seems to me, like Mr. Balfour, enter his business with certain fixed principles, so worked into his nature that they come at call: nay, come almost automatically in the pressure of business life. Now what these principles ought to be you are much better able to determine than any minister preaching in the pulpit, but I think there are two or three suggestions which might be useful to some who are hearing me. One of these principles to be ingrained in the constitution of the business man is, that *all business practices and methods are to be tried, not by the prevailing customs of the trade or profession, but by the Spirit of Jesus Christ.* That the trade itself approves them has nothing

to do with the Christian's conduct. If Christ does not approve, the thing stands condemned. Another of these suggested principles should be written on the palms of the hands, and so engraved in the conscience that at last it shines in the very expression of the face. "*Lie not one to another, seeing ye have put off the old man and his deeds*"; if the others lie, I cannot, because I am a new creature in Christ Jesus. And another principle which is perhaps a little overlooked, but is certainly deserving of discussion, is that *fair business is always that which confers mutual benefits, so that where in the transaction one begins to see that the advantage lies entirely on his own side and the other party is losing or not benefiting, there the dangerous line is crossed and the transaction may be regarded as questionable*. I say these principles by which we are to act must be determined by each one for himself, each Christian man must make them clear in his mind,

fixed in his conscience, before he goes into the duties of life. It is impossible to sit down on each occasion and work the whole thing out: it is necessary to have obtained beforehand a guiding line so distinct that reflection is hardly needed.

But it may be said, and is said, by a great many, "If we were to act on these principles, or in fact upon any principles which we conceive to be thoroughly Christian, we could not get on. In the case of employed, we should be dismissed from our firm, in the case of employers, we should be pushed aside by more unscrupulous competitors." Nor is it, so it is often said, a matter of getting rich; it is a matter of simply maintaining a footing at all in modern London industry; and if we do not act as others do, we shall inevitably be trodden down by this "hungry generation." Now, what I am going to say seems a very hard saying, and yet it must be said. I do not know how any man can be a follower

of Jesus Christ who is not prepared to face ruin and starvation if necessary in order to follow Him. Did not He say as much? Did He not say that He would require a man to give up house and lands and even wife and children for His Name's sake? It is true He added "to receive a hundredfold, and in the world to come life everlasting," but He clearly saw the possibility that the compensation would be a great way off, and unless we can disregard all consequences and in simple self-sacrifice dare to die rather than disobey, I fear we must not delude ourselves with the idea that we are Christians; nor must we bear the name of disciples of the Son of God. "We *must* do such and such things," say some. Yes, possibly, you must, if you are determined at all costs to live, to be prosperous, to grow rich; but there is no *must* at all if you are determined at all costs to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

“Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness,” and supposing, to take the extreme case, that the light is simply the inward peace of a man who is ending his days in the workhouse as a pauper amongst paupers because he followed his conscience and his God, that light is better than all the dazzling splendour of recognition which may come by following questionable courses, for this last is a mere *ignis fatuus* which leads us dancing and leaping down into the dismal swamp. I say it, feeling the extreme difficulty of speaking to men who are often exposed to great temptations, but I say it with deep conviction: it is always possible that the true man and the good will have to be ruined, and it is always necessary that the true man and the good prefer ruin to one slight deviation from the path of simple truth and righteousness.

Now the *third group* of difficulties which was mentioned have melted away

whenever any one of us has acted according to the principles which have just been laid down. The maintenance of a true inward life with God, and a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man—this in itself will make us an influence powerful for Him wherever we go. If you look at all the forms of Christian service which are open to the business man, I should describe them briefly in this way: first of all, the most affectionate consideration for all persons whom he employs, a sensitive regard for their interests, and a tender love for their souls; secondly, a ready tact to speak a word in season even to people with whom one is only doing casual business; and, thirdly, a mind at leisure from itself to enter into all the schemes of amelioration and beneficence around us, to give spare hours to the work of your church, or to the service of man, which is in itself a service of your church; I say if you consider all

these forms of service you find that they, together with all fruitfulness of Christian character and life, come not from our own frenetic efforts, but simply from the quiet maintenance of a life that is hidden with Christ in God and the scrupulous refusal, cost what it may, to violate conscience in even the slightest detail. Where a man walks with God in that way, and where his conduct corresponds to that inward life, he need not often speak, for his life is an epistle known and read of all men. But on the other hand, there will be occasions on which speech will be possible and inevitable, and then the words spoken will come driven home with all the irresistible force of a character that is strong and firm in God, and a conduct which casts no slur upon His blessed Name.

Now, perhaps I may be allowed in concluding to-night to say simply two things. The first is this : Some to whom I am speaking probably have a very hard

struggle—harder than I know, harder than any one knows, except God—to earn a mere pittance is all that you expect from your life task, and to earn that honestly involves constant privation and hardship ; temptations to doubtful courses present themselves every day of the week, and you are sorely perplexed at times to see that, while the wicked prosper, the way of the righteous is turned upside down. Probably one of the things that distresses you most of all is, that there is a man in your business, the manager or employer, who has a great reputation in the Christian world, and a very bad reputation in his own business. But whatever may be the special form of pressure, you come sometimes to feel that to maintain the Christian life in these circumstances is well-nigh impossible. I want to remind you, my brother, the end of life—the purpose for which it is given—is not to produce wealth, but to produce character ; the hard ways in which you

are walking, the difficulties you are facing, will perhaps lead you to poverty at the end, but when the end has come, it will be found that that manful wrestle with wrong, that sturdy refusal to walk in the slippery way, that preference of failure to sin, has made you a man after God's own heart. It would be a mistake, would it not, for the silver to refuse the furnace and the hammer of the forge, and for comfort's sake to be left in the dross unwrought? We are told about one of the later Roman Emperors, Constantius Chlorus, that when he came to the throne he threatened to dismiss from his service every Christian who would not renounce his faith, and then from the few men who preferred the dismissal of the Emperor to the denial of Christ he chose his most trusted ministers and kept them all his life. And God has a process not unlike that in His dealings with us. I seem to hear the edict going forth about some of you, "We will try him, tempt him, put

him in the furnace, thrust him out, as it were, into all temptation, and when he is tried he shall have the crown of life."

The other thing I want to say is of a different kind. It has often been a great trouble to me that I could be of so little practical use to you, my dear friends—the people engaged in the business of daily life,—that I could not stand by you when the temptation came, or even offer you encouragement when the temptation had ended in defeat. But it has occurred to me lately that perhaps I have a power to help you which is greater than I knew; that, perhaps, to pray for you will be better than to speak to you. The wavering battle with Amalek was maintained by Moses holding up the hands of prayer on a height above the battle-field, and I have therefore determined that, though I cannot be with you in business, I will take all of you whom I know—and especially those who are exposed to peculiar temptations—I will take you day by day

in the arms of prayer before God, and I will follow you in spirit : the young man who has to face dismissal because he will be true, the employer who has to face poverty because he will not engage in a dishonest competition ; I mean to follow you in prayer ; I mean to constantly wrestle with the Father in heaven, that He will stand by you and not suffer you to fall, but will bring you out of the furnace more than conquerors through Him that loved us. It may not be a great service in appearance, but do you remember what King Arthur said as he vanished across the mystic lake ?

More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy
voice

Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats,
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,
Both for themselves and those who call them
friend ?

For so the whole round world is every way
Bound by gold chains about the throne of God.

And I would call you, if you would let me, friends, and being largely powerless to help you in what seem to be practical ways, I would wrestle for you with these golden chains of prayer about the throne of God, that your heart may be fortified and your life may be sustained, and that your garments may not be spotted by the world; so that when it is all over and done, and you are passing out of this present world, the battle, the conflict ended, it will be possible to say of you, "He has not died rich, he has not died distinguished, but he has gone to God, he has entered into the kingdom of heaven; for he kept his garments unspotted, he would not be seduced, he would not betray his trust." "These are they who came out of great tribulation"; they were tempted and tossed, but God gave them the victory; and to them that overcome it is given to sit down upon the throne of God. Oh, my dear brethren, and sisters who are tempted too, if my

words to you to-night prove visionary, and beside the mark, I would to God that my prayers, at least, might be effectual for you.

II.

**THE CHRISTIAN IN PUBLIC
LIFE.**

THE CHRISTIAN IN PUBLIC LIFE.

“My people love to have it so.”—JER. v. 31.

IN the fifth chapter of Jeremiah that patriotic prophet paints a somewhat gloomy picture of the people of his own day. He tells us that amongst the people there were found wicked men who lay in wait for the souls of others as hunters lie in wait for their prey; that, notwithstanding this conduct, though their houses were full of deceit, as a cage is of birds, they were prospering, growing rich, and fat, and shining. This conduct and this success were accompanied by a total ignorance of the cause of the fatherless and the right of the needy. But, worse than this—the evil which makes the prophet cry out, “Astonishment and horror are come to

pass in the land"—the religious teachers of the people were teaching falsely, and in consequence of that false teaching the accredited ministers or priests were maintaining a rule over the people that was not according to God's will—a rule which really tended to the interests of the priestly order rather than to the interests of the people. But even this was not the worst: the worst of all—that which made the prophet break off without any conclusion, simply putting the pertinent question, "What will ye do in the end thereof?"—was, that God's people "loved to have it so."

Now, if we turn immediately from the days of Jeremiah to our own day we find a good deal that recalls those ancient circumstances. The condition of our own country demands the voice of a prophet. We have just been reminded that in our own country places, and in those villages which are so picturesque and interesting to the traveller, numbers of our people

are living in foul rookeries, often eight people sleeping in one room, an open drain generating typhoid and reducing the vital power of the inhabitants, and pure water, even under God's beautiful sky, practically inaccessible to the people. We have learned how their life is dull and tedious; how their spirit is broken and their independence destroyed; how their wages, in spite of all the efforts of recent years, are still so low that the only prospect of a large proportion of the agricultural population is to end their days in the Union, with its dreary cheerlessness and stigma of social disgrace. In the towns of England we know, or, at least we might know if we would, how great masses of the people are living in crowded and unhealthy houses; how the streets are dreary and unbeautiful; how the only ornament of many parts of the great towns is the flaring gin-shop, which has a promise of comfort and beauty, and by that very promise leads the weak to their

destruction. We know how these, the bright points of London, are erected, not for the good of the people, but simply by the power of great capitalists, who are licensed by the Government without the least regard to the effect that is produced by their trade. We know how there are something like 300,000 people in London who live a life either of toil under grinding exactions, or, still more miserable, of uncertain employment, with no assurance of to-morrow's meal. We know that the sores of the city are open and rank, and we know how our people in this Christian country are sunk in a kind of religious ignorance, which is practically brutish, hardly to be paralleled even in some of the great heathen countries of the world.

Meanwhile our religious teachers, until quite lately, have been accustomed to tell us that this is really not our concern, and that we as Christians are only called upon

to preach the Gospel to the people in the sense that we are to tell them about a future world and how to get there ; if we have any concern with the social miseries it is only to make occasional contributions of money, which, being misspent and misapplied, has been the occasion very largely of producing the very evils which are deplored. In consequence of this teaching of the prophets, the priests, or professional ministers of the Christian Church, have gradually allied themselves with the wealthy and the powerful in the country, and have given the impression that they have nothing to do with the control and the administration of the country, or, if they are to interfere at all, they will interfere in the interests, not of the people but, of the Church ; and they have shut their own eyes and succeeded also in sealing the eyes of multitudes of Christian men and women to the condition and needs of the poor.

But the present question is whether the people "love to have it so." The faults of prophets or of priests will not be visited upon us unless we acquiesce in them. The question I want to put to you this morning is, to what extent we love to have it so. Now, I fear there are a great many Christian people who make it almost a boast that they have no interest in public affairs. They say that their religion is to be kept undefiled by contact with the public life of the day. And I think they quote a text, or misquote it, where the Lord Jesus said that His kingdom is not of this world. I say they misquote it, because they imply that His kingdom was not meant to rule over this world. What, of course, He really meant and said was that His authority was not derived from this world, which is a very different thing. I want to ask you for a few moments to consider the position which is taken by a great many Chris-

tian people, especially in this anarchic city, those who make it a point of religious duty, as it were, to neglect one of the greatest of all duties. It is perfectly true that Jesus Christ Himself and His Apostles did not take part in the public life of their own time, because Christ came on earth at a time when it was impossible to take part in public life. The whole of Europe and Asia, under the Roman Empire, was governed despotically, and there was no room for individual citizen activity. And, no doubt, this was with a purpose. The Lord came to discover the individual, and to assert the rights and the interests of every soul of man. But if we would understand His mission we must surely bear in mind that in the background of His Gospel was the teaching and the work of the prophets of Israel, which, as He very significantly said, He had come to fulfil and not to destroy. Now the teaching of these prophets of Israel and their

work throughout may be described as public work. Take for example the ministry of Amos in the Northern Kingdom, or the ministry of Micah in the Southern Kingdom, and you find it is the outcry of the agricultural labourer and of the oppressed mechanic against false administration, against the cruelty and the want of thought on the part of the wealthy members of the community. Take the great prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, and you find that their ministry was throughout the ministry of public life. They were even more statesmen than preachers, their work was directed mainly to legislation. They had to preach in the courts of the kings, and they felt it to be their duty to mould the policy of their nation. Daniel is still more striking, because he was in a foreign country, and not in his native country, and yet his ministry throughout was one of public influence, a ministry at the source of government; and his visions

can be described as chiefly political forecasts upon a great scale. Now we have to remember that our Lord, when He came into this world, immediately identified His whole life with the ministry of those prophets who had gone before. In the synagogue at Nazareth, making, as it were, the starting-point of His ministry, He took up the roll of the prophet Esaias and read this passage: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." In this emphatic way He immediately connected His ministry with all the great work of the prophets that went before, and said as distinctly as language could say it, "I have not come to destroy, but to fulfil the work of the prophets."

Now it has generally been assumed that what He meant by this was, that He wished His followers to turn away from all the duties of public life, and to try to redress the wrongs of humanity by preaching what has been called the Gospel, the Gospel being understood in that connection to be simply this, "Turn your eyes away from the wrongs of humanity, and take refuge in the thought of a blessed future where these wrongs will no longer exist." I cannot imagine any more perverted way of explaining the language of the Lord Jesus. Surely the natural explanation is this:—The prophets had denounced all social wrong, the prophets had demanded of the government of their day to destroy these evils in their midst; the nation had been destroyed because the government would not do what the prophets told them. The Lord Jesus came into the world, and immediately took up the work of the prophets, and said He had come on

purpose to accomplish the work which the government of Israel refused to attempt. Therefore, though He had nothing to do with the despotic government of His own day, and left the Cæsar to perish as the Cæsar richly deserved to perish, yet he infused into every soul that believed in Him a Divine power which was meant to literally take possession of all the reins of government upon earth, and administer this world in the Name of the King to whom it belonged.

If this is His meaning, what follows? He must look with grief upon many of His followers to-day, who have made it a kind of principle to neglect this source of influence and to cherish the spiritual life, as they would call it, in their own hearts, leaving the world to itself, with the terrible result that England, the most Christian of countries, has become an astonishment and a horror even to the heathen world. No such thing is known in

heathendom as the corruption and shame and misery of our own degraded country ! Now either these sermons are practical or they are nothing, and I am not asking you to discuss these questions in any speculative spirit, but simply that we may apply the principles of the Lord Jesus to all our life—public and private. I want you to reflect for a moment upon the great city of which we are necessarily citizens, though, I suppose, most of us became so without any definite choice. According to the current notion, the command of our Lord is fulfilled if we build churches, chapels, and mission-rooms, set people to preach in them, and get the waste corners in the public street occupied by preachers who are proclaiming the same simple Gospel of salvation through faith. According to the teaching of the Bible, that must be done ; but another thing must not be left undone. We must recognise that the condition of London—its misery,

its shame, its sin—is, in a very large degree, the natural and inevitable result of a great city of five millions of people being practically ungoverned, having no efficient administration, no sufficient organisation, no real co-ordination of its parts. I have heard unbelievers say that they cannot believe in God because London is so miserable, as if God had made London miserable. He has taught us that government is necessary, and if we leave a great mass of human beings ungoverned we violate His law and make them wretched.

I know that some people will think it is a desecration of the pulpit if I mention a simple fact, but I venture to say it is one of the first facts which the Lord Jesus would mention in modern London. We are told that the cost of supplying London with water is £700,000, and the price that London has to pay for it—not very good water, and not a very full supply—is £1,700,000, which means simply

that because you will not govern your city, but leave it entirely to the mercy of individual speculators, you allow these men, not bad in themselves, but made bad by your neglect, to wring £1,000,000 from the people of London over and above the real cost of the water which is supplied. Supplying water, you think, is not a Christian duty, but indeed it is. If men cannot get pure water to drink, they will drink other things. If men cannot get sufficient water to wash in, they will be physically dirty, morally unclean, and spiritually insensible. It is a vital question that the people should drink pure water, and be constantly and thoroughly washed. And yet in this great city there are over thirty parishes which do not supply any public wash-house or bath of any description, although it is well known that there are 200,000 people amongst us whose homes consist of a single room. It is your duty as a Christian to preach the Gospel—to go

to these 200,000 people in single rooms and tell them about the water of life; but is it not your duty also to go to the great city in which they live and demand in Christ's Name that they shall have pure water to drink and to wash in?

To my mind the two things go together; the Lord could not possibly have separated them. He would not have talked about the Water of Life until He had given them water to drink, just as He did not speak about saving their souls until He had touched their bodies with His healing hand and cured them. I could continue for the greater part of this morning simply telling you the unutterable abominations of this city, which are due not to any man's wickedness, but to the general neglect of the whole of London, to the fact that its citizens do not care, and do not take the trouble to see, that their great city is properly administered. Now let us face this

question this morning. When the Lord comes to ask an account of our life as citizens of London will He not draw up a long bill of the things which are simply due to bad government or no government? The want of water, the want of proper supervision of the lodging-houses, the want of careful arrangement for the housing of the people and for the proper administration of the laws which are already made for the housing of the people, will He not draw up an account of all these evils which have resulted from these causes, and then whom will He hold responsible? Parliament? The County Council? The Vestry? He is not so unjust. He will hold us responsible! For it is our duty to appoint these bodies, and if we appoint or re-appoint them simply on the principle of idle party contests—or, still worse, on principles of personal pecuniary interest—the Lord will send the bill home to us and charge us with all the sin and

misery and shame which result from our neglect.*

Now, I feel that in speaking about the government of London some of us scarcely realise what the great social revolution, that everything should be in the hands of its citizens, has meant. And, granting that everything is placed in the hands of its citizens, have we realised what it means when an enormous section of the Christian citizens deliberately abstain from voting and from entering into public life, and therefore leave the government in the hands of un-Christian citizens, and allow all questions of vital importance to be determined not by the Spirit of Christ, but by the spirit of individual interest? I want to close this morning—leaving this great question practically undealt with, for there is only time to refer to it in the rough—I

* The election of the Second County Council for London was a sign following closely upon the delivery of this address that the citizens are at last beginning to awake from their apathy.

want to close by quoting an example which will probably linger in the minds of all, the conduct of that same man of whom I spoke last Sunday evening, Mr. Alexander Balfour of Liverpool. Though Liverpool was his adopted city only, he, like every true man, learnt to love the city in which he lived with an intense passion. He felt for it almost as a Jew used to feel for Jerusalem. He was constantly praying for it and constantly working for it. He went into the Town Council at Liverpool distinctly as a Christian man, without any taint of personal ambition, without any object of personal gain, on this principle, "The Town Council should be governed by Jesus Christ, and I, therefore, as a Christian man go there to represent Him." Bravely did he work, and not altogether without effect, producing many striking and obvious changes in the social condition of Liverpool. In that diary, to which I referred last Sunday, you will find entries of this kind: "Prayer for

state of mind that God can use me to speak in the Council on the 2nd June." "Prayer for wisdom and strength to testify at the Town Council to-morrow against electing publicans to be aldermen." He seemed to think it necessary not only to pray on the day of the Council meeting, but to make it a matter of prayer for days beforehand, that when he stood up in his place in the Council of Liverpool, he should stand there obviously as a Christian man witnessing for Christ. A more fervently spiritual and inward life I have not read, but where it differs from so much London spiritual life is just here, that he feels the necessity of going out into the work-a-day world and bringing the principles of Jesus Christ to bear on the community in which we live. It may seem to some a very small matter to move in public life, but let me put it in this way by taking an obvious illustration. Supposing any one of us tries hard for a twelvemonth by personal prayer to rescue

one unhappy drunkard from his evil and destroying habit, none of us hesitates to say that that is a Christian work ; but we do not see at once that it is just as much a Christian work to go to the root of the matter, and to say that any system by which drunkards are produced in numbers far and away beyond any of our methods of reclamation is wrong and must be altered. We all know that in Norway and Sweden, for example, a great moral reformation has been effected, and one of the most drunken communities in the world changed into one of the most sober, in the course of twenty years, by a simple change in the licensing law. Now, men do not seem to see that if Christ is the real Saviour of the world He wants a voice in every licensing law ; He must have His will carried out in such a carnal matter as the sale of strong drink, and He requires His servants to do it because one cannot depend on any people to carry out a simple principle of disinterested righteous-

ness except those men in whom He dwells. It seems to me that when Mr. Balfour, for instance, spent his days as his diary mentions, in praying for power to speak in the Town Council of Liverpool, he was doing precisely the same work and in exactly the same spirit as when a minister of the Gospel spends his week in study and thought and prayer that he may be able to speak for Christ in his pulpit on Sunday. As Christian men in London, knowing the terrible condition of the city; knowing the indifference of the great mass of the citizens, an indifference which allows them to look upon the greatest question of the day—the education of the children—with an almost absolute unconcern, so that you can only induce them to take a part in the voting when they have some petty denominational interest to serve; when we realise the absence of public spirit, which makes it possible for the vestry of this district, for example, to be

appointed for its great work, governing a community of 40,000 people by a number of electors hardly more numerous than the number elected, because we will not take the trouble to vote ; when we recollect that the consequence of men being elected by bogus electorates is that there is no adequate sense of public responsibility, no sense of duty, no consciousness of a great public opinion searching and trying them moment by moment, and that, for want of this, they are always slipping into ways which we should slip into as well if we were in their place (for no man can live up to a great standard if he is shut up, as it were, in a closet) ; when we remember the condition of London, the causes of that condition, and bring the whole city into the presence of Jesus Christ and ask Him what He would have us to do ; and especially when we read the prophets, from Isaiah to Malachi, which constitute far the best treatise on politics which is known to me, and when we come

to understand the gist of their ministry and the way in which Christ adopted all they taught and came to give it completeness: I believe we shall be in the way of escaping the position of indifference and apathy and selfishness and personal absorption which allows us to see a great community ruined for want of the simplest elements of government and administration. Those who are gifted with wide public influence, those who have the power of speech and a clear brain for administration, will feel that although little earthly honour attaches to their work on vestries and county councils and school boards, they go to do work for Christ and in Christ's name. They will not be concerned with what men say for them or against them, but will simply be interested upon their knees to bring the Spirit of Christ into every department of our public life, and especially to make the neglected, the fatherless, and the outcast, know that what is guiding

the policy of vestry and council and board is not the interests of those who can very well look after their own affairs, but the interests of Christ's people, Christ's outcasts, those about whom He has solemnly told us that what we do to them He will regard as done to Himself, and what we leave undone to them He will regard as the gross omission of personal service to Him.

III.

**THE CHRISTIAN IN THE
HOME.**

THE CHRISTIAN IN THE HOME.

'Tis education forms the common mind,
Just as the twig is bent the tree's inclined.

POPE.

IN the first chapter of Luke, the 66th verse, there is a question asked to which I wish to draw your attention to-night. The question is: "What, then, shall this Child be?" and I want to ask you to stand in imagination by the cradle of a new-born child—one of the most solemn and most mysterious places in all the world. We put this question with regard to the child, "What will it be?" The answer comes, the simple answer, which will cover ninety-nine cases out of a hundred: "This child will be what its parents make it!" It is an answer which, I suppose, is likely to give every parent serious thought,

and to make even the most indifferent consider, but it is an answer which, after consideration, appears more true than before. Now, it is a very curious fact that, as you rise in the scale of life, the offspring become more and more dependent upon the parent. Most oviparous creatures do not depend upon their parents at all when once the eggs are produced. Birds depend upon their parents for the hatching of the eggs, and in some cases for their food while they are fledglings. But in other cases they seem independent even of this slight attention; a barn-door chicken, directly it breaks the shell of its egg, proceeds to pick up the grain upon the ground and feed itself as if it had been accustomed to it for years. When you come into the kingdom of the mammalia of course the offspring are dependent for a considerable time upon the parents, but when you come into the kingdom of Man, you find

that no creature is made so closely dependent, and for so long, upon the will of the parents. No creature seems to be born with so few instincts, no creature is so helpless even to maintain life, and no creature remains for so long a period dependent upon the teaching and the example and the training of those who brought it into being. What is the meaning of that? It seems as if God intended that the parent should have a really good chance of making something of the child, that every parent should have a certain opportunity of impressing upon the young plastic life the whole total of good which the parent knows. It seems as if God took the lower creatures into His own training to be their Nurse, but gave over the higher creature—man—to the parent who produced it to be his nurse. By this arrangement the parent has an opportunity of impressing upon the child all the results of human growth and human expe-

rience. God says to every parent, pointing to the little child in the cradle: "Now, you can make this little creature or you can mar it. You can fit it to be the heir of all the ages by shaping its character and sowing in the soul, while it is fresh, the seeds of knowledge and wisdom; or you can make it lower than the brute." If a dog is neglected, supposing he should find food, his moral character does not seem to suffer materially; he may be as good as another dog; but if a child is neglected, it is left like an empty house, in which unclean creatures are sure to come and make their abode, if it does not even become the habitation of devils. That seems to be the great distinction of the human child.

Now, we have heard a great deal in recent years about the tendencies which are transmitted by heredity from parent to child, and certainly it is a very terrible reflection that the bad habits of the parent

may be wrought in the very tissues of the child. But I cannot help thinking that, like most truths which are comparatively new, this truth has been overstated. A child does not owe so much to heredity as materialistic science thinks, and it owes a great deal more to training than most of us are inclined to realise. It is more like a slate than that piece of paper with invisible ink-writing on it to which it has been compared. There is next to nothing on it. The slate may have a crack or two, an old scar which will become visible later on, but, broadly speaking, it is a clean slate when you start with it. I remember being very much struck by noticing once or twice an incident in Dr. Barnardo's methods of rescuing children from degradation. He has several times mentioned a case of a little child of three or four years of age taken out of a perfect nest of vice, a child of the most degraded parents, brought up for those three or four years in an atmosphere which is like poison to the

soul, so that the poor little baby lips are polluted with all kinds of obscenities and blasphemies; and yet this little child, put into the kind and Christian guardianship of the homes which Dr. Barnardo has formed, will grow up to be as sweet and untainted a soul as if it had come out of a good and religious home. The heredity may count as one part in ten, but the nine other parts of training are able to reverse even the heredity.

“What, then, shall this child be?” That is the question, and the answer is: “It depends upon what you as parents do.” In a country like England, where the responsibility of the parents is not only recognised, but most jealously guarded, where legislation often prefers—and I think very rightly—the ruin of the individual child to any interference with the permanent rights of father and mother, almost everything depends for this little child upon what its parents are, and what its parents do, in

bringing it up. Teachers, both in week-day schools and Sunday-schools, are constantly impressing it upon us that they can do but little with the children. They can teach them a great many things which go into the head and form the furniture of the mind ; but, after all, they are powerless to affect the character, the tastes, the real habits, the will, and the morality, which have all been formed at home. Practically, no one can lift or materially share the supreme responsibility of the parent. In ancient Sparta, we are told, on one occasion when two young men were disturbing the peace of the town by quarrelling, the magistrates sent to arrest the father. In their opinion the culpability lay at the door of the one who had brought the boys up. And I sometimes wonder whether there is not something similar to that in the Divine dealings with men, and, while God will not visit the sins of the father upon the children, we are never told that He will

not visit the sins of the children upon the father. I can well believe that, for that large class of sins to which a child is tempted by the wrong training or neglect of the parents, the child will not be held responsible, but the charge will be sent home to the guilty parents.

Now, believing as I do in this responsibility of the parents—and I have little doubt that you all substantially agree with me—I want, if you will let me, to lay before you three or four signal truths which, I think, will be very easily remembered, and may, I trust, be of some help to parents, especially young parents, in bringing up their children. The first of these truths is this: *these little children, when they come fresh into your hands, are the beloved property of Jesus Christ.* By one memorable word He claimed them all when He said, “Let them come unto Me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.” The disciples wished to push them back, and,

strange to say, the descendants of the disciples ever since have had a great grudge against them, and by all kinds of dogmatic teaching have tried to stamp them as it were with a curse; but Jesus Christ blessed them. Following a mistaken reading of the Latin New Testament, St. Augustine taught a doctrine which laid hold of Christendom, a doctrine which is generally called that of Original Sin, the gist of which was that all children are born, as it were, reprobate; they had sinned in Adam, and, therefore, to start with, they were all wrong. Over against that teaching of St. Augustine, for which there is no real authority in the New Testament, stands the simple word of Jesus Christ, "Suffer them to come unto Me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." And if Jesus Christ said this indiscriminately of all little children, with how much more meaning would He say it of Christian little children! I mean little children

born of Christian parents. There is a passage in St. Paul to which I should like to turn your attention. It occurs in 1 Cor. vii. 14, where St. Paul is arguing that, if one of the parents is a Christian and the other not, the Christian parent sanctifies the unchristian, "else," he says, "your children would be unclean, but *now they are holy.*" One Christian parent will make the children holy, according to St. Paul. This is the foundation of the practice, which is common in most of our churches, of Infant Baptism. The view that is held is simply this: these children have one Christian parent—sometimes it is the father, a great deal more frequently it is the mother—and because one of these parents is a Christian, the little child is, according to St. Paul, holy. The Christian society says to the parent, "Bring your little child, and let us at once recognise to whom the child belongs. And then take your little child—you, the parent, not the god-

parent, who has little or nothing to do with its training—and bring it up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Now, that is the first point I want to impress upon all parents, young parents especially, when they have that little child in their hands: remember from the first day it belongs to Jesus Christ; it is His beloved property, for He says, “Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

The second truth that I want to put before you is this. The last commandment that Jesus Christ gave to the disciples before He left the earth was, that they should go and make disciples of all people. “Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you.” Now, I should think, if He gave that commandment to His disciples, supposing the disciples were fathers, they would feel that the first step in carrying it out would be to make disciples of

their own children, and when they began to speak to other men they would say, "We want to make disciples of you, and then your first duty will be to make disciples of your own children; make disciples of them, baptize them, teach them, and bring them up from the very first to understand the claims and the teaching of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." I do not know how to speak plainly and strongly enough upon this question. I believe there are multitudes throughout the land whose life has been more or less shadowed because this simple principle was not adopted. Your parents were Christian people, and tried to bring you up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and yet they always left upon you the impression that you had to go through some terrible process of conversion and change before you could become Christians. And a great deal of your young life was clouded by that

mistaken idea. Your parents did not venture—they had not Divine faith enough—to tell you as little children that you belonged to Him, that He loved you, that He did not want to wait until you had grown old and hoary in sin, and then by a great reconversion to make you a new creature; but He had claimed you from the first, and He wanted you as little children to yield your hearts to Him and to believe that He had died to save you. Do not make that mistake with your children. Let them know early enough how the Saviour loves them, and how the Saviour died for them. It is true that in after years your children may choose otherwise for themselves—it is sadly true. We are told that even the angels in heaven fell and rebelled against God in the very presence of God; we are told that one of the twelve chosen disciples who listened to Jesus from day to day was a traitor; and it is possible, of course, that a child brought up for Christ

may yet at last rebel against Him and refuse to be His ; but you at any rate will have fulfilled your part. Duties belong to us ; events to God. If you have brought up your little child to know Jesus Christ as his Saviour, and if afterwards he chooses to reject Him, he will never be able to say, "It was my father's fault, it was my mother's fault"—it will be, it must be, his own.

But now the third truth which I want to mention is, if you claim these little children as Christ's, and if you intend to bring them up for Him to make disciples of them, *you must have a home that is fit for them.* It is not every home that will do for a child of God. And this brings us to the great practical question of making the home—and what a world lies hidden under that simple phrase ! Now, of course it is not possible for all of us to make a rich home, to make a beautiful home, to make even a comfortable home ; but it is possible for

all of us to make a Christian home. If it is only a garret Christ may be there, for the first home He had on earth was the stall of a stable in an Eastern caravan-serai. I do most emphatically protest that money, wealth, position, have nothing whatever to do with the making of the home. The most exquisite description of a home in our language is the "Cotter's Saturday Night," and I am told that our beloved Queen regards that poem of Robert Burns as the best in all our literature. If that be so, the Queen recognises that the best home may be a cottage, and indeed we must all know that, for many of the essential qualities of a home, a cottage is more favourable than a palace. There are four pillars which should hold up the roof-tree: Unselfishness, purity, discipline, and love. Where those four pillars stand the thatch may be straw; it may be a very simple place, but it will be a home. Let us grant, for example, that the father is "one

that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection, with all gravity," as St. Paul puts it. Let us grant that the mother is, as he says in another place—the Epistle to Titus (ii. 5)—“a woman who knows how to stay in the house”—a very remarkable passage that; and let us grant also that the children under this beautiful home-light of the woman's influence have been taught to love and to serve one another, to seek each the other's good: and there you have a home. Very simple, but the best thing on earth is a home so made.

Yes, I must say it again. There are many households, both rich and poor, which are no fit place for God's little children to be brought up in: households where wranglings and bitter words prevail day after day, where selfishness and deceit are the constant undertone of life, where fitful gusts of affection alternate with the sharpest severities, where religion is laughed at, or, what is very much worse,

professed on the lip and unknown in the heart. In such a home the poor little children are all at a terrible disadvantage, and I do not know how they can come out of it anything but atheists or hypocrites. It is a great thing, is this making of the home, and unless we make it a-right the children cannot be brought up rightly.

There is just one other truth I want to mention. I spoke just now about the fathers exercising discipline "with all gravity," and that leads us to a very homely subject, which has to be dealt with sometimes. In a former day, the fathers of our flesh chastened us as seemed good to them, and sometimes with great severity, and sometimes even with great injustice. The punishment was often severe just where it ought to have been light, and light where it ought to have been severe. The worst faults were overlooked because they did not interfere with the peace of the parents, but the slightest fault which

disturbed their peace was visited with a savage vindictiveness. In this generation, perhaps, there has been a reaction, and the tendency with parents now is to show a leniency unknown to our fathers. Probably the want of discipline ruins more homes in England to-day than any other single cause—the fact that there is no head to the household because the head has resigned; and the home cannot, any more than the State, flourish without a head. There are many children ruined for want of that firm, strong hand of fatherly discipline; and I would entreat young fathers never to abdicate that throne. But how to exercise it? Here is a passage which I will commend to you from the Life of John Paton: “If anything very serious required to be punished, our father retired first to his closet for prayer, and we boys grew to understand that he was laying the whole matter before God, and that was the severest part of the punishment for me to bear. I could have

defied any amount of mere penalty, but this spoke to my conscience as a message from God." I think that is rather like God's own way of punishing His children. When God wants to punish men there is no vindictiveness about it, no injustice. What does He do? He goes to the Cross and bears it Himself, and the astonished world sees the Father lifting up the whole burden of its sin in the Person of His Son. That is the kind of punishment which He gives. If you want to punish your children rightly, go into your closet and lay the matter before God. Do not tell the children what you are doing—they will soon find it out, and when you come from the throne of God with the calm, stern, simple determination to punish your child for what he has done wrong, you will hardly have to lift your hand; the punishment will lie in your very face, and the child will tremble under the sense of that mysterious authority which has been derived by the father on earth from the Father in

Heaven. I know no other way of giving punishment, and if there were more parents like that simple, God-fearing Scottish peasant, there would be more heroes like that missionary, John Paton.

Now, I would like to say to parents in closing that there is no nobler task in which any man can be engaged, or any woman either, than that of training the children in the home. You need not think that it is time thrown away or effort unobserved. Our great and splendid public appearances are all of very little moment compared with the influences which we exercise in our own households. If you have taught your own children well, if you have proved to be a good father, you will be fit for anything; you will be fit to govern the State, you will be fit to be wealthy—and very few people are fit for that; you will be fit for any society, and, best of all, you will be fit for heaven. We are told about one of the great liberators of Italy, the man who

in after days won the title of the Iron Baron, Ricasoli the Tuscan, that up to the very eve of the struggle for national independence, he had lived in complete retirement; hardly anybody knew him, for his occupation during the best years of his life had been simply to educate and to train his one beloved child whose name was Bertina. In training that little child, he had become fit to be one of Italy's leaders—a patriot and a hero!

Let no man think he will find better work on earth than to bring up a little child to be a child of God! Let no woman think there is a wider, nobler sphere of influence than to make the little home over which she is the presiding light a place in which a little child of God can live. And supposing parents are convinced of what I have been saying to them, and are determined to approach their great task in this spirit; supposing they mean henceforth to claim their little children

as belonging to Jesus Christ, to bring them up as His, to make the home as like the heavenly model as they possibly can, and to exercise a wise discipline upon their knees and in the presence of God, what do you think will be the result? The home that you have thus made will be to the children you bring up within its doors the very dearest place on earth. In after years they will look back upon it as the most beautiful place that imagination can conceive. It will seem to them that it was a little sanctuary, a heaven upon earth. Their ideal of enjoyment all their life will be those homely scenes, the love and tenderness which used to greet them at breakfast in the morning, and the hush of the family worship when all knelt down in prayer to God ; the duties of the day, laborious and painful, with the sweet background of the home always in sight ; the evening and the twilight with the romps of the children, the loud peals of laughter around the fire, the tales

that were told, the games that were played, the growing seriousness of the discussions as childhood passed into young manhood and young womanhood, and the time came for launching upon life; the father's thought, the mother's tears, when they sent the boys out to the great city; and again the solemn hush of the gathering for worship as the day closed in, the hovering presence of angels that seemed to fly white-winged over the little bed and never quite to leave us in the dark, and that half-revealed face of God which used to look out upon us from our mother's and our father's face—these will be the abiding memory which no chance or change of life can tear away. And to the end the most beautiful adjective in the English language will be to say that the thing was "home-like," and the best description of heaven will be to say that it is "the home over there!"

Children brought up in homes like this,

will they go wrong? It is possible that for a time one and another will be misled by false lights, and will wander away, but, like the Prodigal in the parable, there will be some element in their nature "true to the kindred points of heaven and home," and when they are afar off they will be drawn back again, they will awake one morning and say, "I will arise and go to my Father; I have sinned against Him." I do not believe that any child can be lost who from the first was laid upon the knees of Christ and held there with praying hands and passionate love and simple faith. Ah! these homes of yours may be poor or rich, they may be large or small, the family may be one or two, or a large circle, but they are the great places of possibility. You may bring the curse down upon them and ruin them; you may bring the blessing of God upon them for evermore.

Parents, young men, young women,

making your homes, see that you make them such that your children when they are grown up will look back upon them and think of them as the type and the promise of the Home over there !

IV.

CHRIST IN ART.

CHRIST IN ART.

ART occupies a large place in the thought of every civilised community, and most civilised people are accustomed to see in it much of what is truest and best in life. But, strange to say, the word, in the special sense which we mean when we use the term *Art* alone, occurs only once in the New Testament. In Acts xvii. 29, the Apostle says: "We ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device." Art is here neither praised nor blamed, but a warning is given that it may be used for the purposes of idolatry, and it is implied that we must draw a distinction between the region of religion and the region of Art. Now if we except the branch of Art which is spoken of sometimes in connection with praise—I mean

music—this is practically all the guidance that the New Testament gives us upon a subject which is, as I have said, necessarily in the mind and thought of every civilised community. “Beware of making Art the occasion or the instrument of idolatry”—so much say our Oracles; for the rest they are silent. Now is this silence that of consent or that of condemnation? Is Art to be treated as a sphere of human life which lies outside the sphere of religion? Are we to say that there is some antagonism between it and the Spirit of Christ? What attitude are we, as Christians, to maintain in relation to Art?

What adds to our perplexity in putting questions like these is that Jesus, who, so far as we know, was unacquainted with any art except the very humble one of carpentry, and spoke no word which bore even remotely on the subject, yet became the inspiration of a great productive activity in Art from the third

century until the present day. His apostles, who never referred to the question at all, have yet been made the subjects of more paintings and statues, and have given their names to more buildings of architectural merit, than the Pagan gods of Greece or Rome. St. Paul, who stood on Mars Hill entirely unmoved, so far as we can tell, by the matchless symmetry of the Parthenon or the friezes of Phidias, has yet figured in the great cartoons of Raphael, and given his name to an oratorio as well as to the metropolitan church in the largest city upon earth. And again, the familiar branches of the fine arts, at any rate such as are before us in England to-day, have all grown more or less directly out of religion, and in the forms that we see them out of the Christian religion. The drama, for example, which seems at first sight the furthest removed from Christianity, had its origin in the mediæval attempts to present in churches the leading facts of the Chris-

tian revelation, and still bears a trace of its origin in the great Passion Play of Ober-Ammergau. Music, the latest of all arts to mature, was born, as it were, in the Church. It is so intensely and necessarily religious that we know of no way of defining which music is religious and which is secular, except by saying that all good music is religious and all bad music is secular. Painting and sculpture, as every visitor to Italy well knows, though traceable in a certain sense to Pagan models, are essentially Christian, and architecture is so identified with religion that almost the only buildings throughout England which are worth continual and repeated study are buildings which were put up for the worship of God.

Here, then, you see, is a problem, or rather a series of problems, which thoughtful minds must wish to have solved, but in which, from the very nature of the case, our religious teachers, speaking almost

exclusively from the subjects treated of in the New Testament, seldom give us any help. Thus there is a curious chasm between our Art and our Religion, a division which sometimes seems to grow into antagonism. Very few people attempt to reconcile them, and generally we are content with the conclusion that some should make their Art their Religion and others should attend to Religion and let Art alone. Ought we not to attempt a solution? And, though I am by no means sure of my ability to give it, let me, at any rate, make one or two suggestions.

Let us approach the subject in this way. The Jews, lying midway between Assyria and Babylonia, Egypt and Greece, the great artist nations of antiquity, were essentially an inartistic race. They seemed to be like a little sacred ground fenced off from the intrusion of these artistic influences. Here was a people that was forbidden to make the likeness of anything

that is in heaven above or in the earth beneath, and our Lord, who, humanly speaking, was the very flower and consummation of His people, was in this respect also "of the Jews." Now, in the choice of Israel as the nation through whom the Saviour of the world should be manifested, and in the relation which He holds to that nation, it seems to me we have the clue to a solution of our problem. Art can never be for the world, for the nation, or for the man, the first consideration. There is something more important which must always come before it. Religion and conduct are what make up the best of life; religion and conduct must stand like a great twin-peaked mountain covered with unapproachable snows, firm upon its own basis, before the hand of Art can sprinkle flowers at its base, or the voice of Art begin to sing hymns in its shadow. Art is concerned with beauty, but truth must always come before beauty; and, indeed, unless truth has

so far gained in the race as to be almost at the goal to start with, beauty will not reach the goal at all. There is, then, something deeply significant in the fact that the nation which is to be the instrument of revelation, should be the most inartistic of civilised communities ; the nation which is, so to speak, absorbed in the practical questions of religion and conduct. Such a fact seems to say to us all, "Let your eyes rest on this mighty mountain peak which cuts the blue, and let your spirit comprehend its strength, its purity, its majesty, before you attempt to sing or to play, to build or to paint or to carve." In this sense the Christian religion,—even more than the matrix of Judaism out of which it grew,—is essentially and intensely Puritanical ; its teaching is, "Men, you are not here first and foremost to be amused, or to be delighted ; you are here first and foremost to get right with God ; you are here first and foremost to make the foundation of your conduct true, and

your conceptions of your destiny pre-dominant. Do not therefore confuse religious realities with æsthetic excitement; let the truth by which the soul lives be as the great mountain, far above the lower regions of taste and sensibility."

Even at the beginning of the fourth century the Synod of Elvira decreed that no paintings should be put upon the walls of churches. The Church had not as yet plunged down the steep abysm of her worldly corruption, she still retained that stiff, stern Puritanism which is her very backbone, and she feared lest the paintings in the churches which were made to adorn them should attract the eye and the heart of the worshipper, and lead to idolatry. And here, in the end of the nineteenth century, the most notable of our Art teachers has said in the Appendix to *The Stones of Venice*: "I do not know, as I have repeatedly stated, how far the splendour of architecture, or other art, is compatible with the honesty and

the usefulness of religious service. The longer I live the more I incline to severe judgment in this matter and the less I can trust the sentiments excited by painted glass and coloured tiles. But if there be indeed value in such things, our plain duty is to direct our strength against the superstition which has dishonoured them, since there are thousands to whom they are now merely an offence, owing to their association with absurd and idolatrous ceremonies. I have but this exhortation," adds Mr. Ruskin, "for all who love them—not to regulate their creeds by their taste in colours, but to hold calmly to the right at whatever present cost to their imaginative enjoyment, sure that they will one day find in heavenly truth a brighter charm than in earthly imagery, and striving chiefly to gather stones for the eternal building, whose walls shall be salvation and whose gates shall be praise." I know that it is a very common thing to hurl reproaches against the vandalism of

our Puritan fathers, who tore the pictures, defaced the sculptures, and desecrated the fabrics of our mediæval churches ; but we sometimes forget that in the seventeenth century these things had lent themselves to idolatry, and our fathers heard again the thunder voice that spoke from Sinai, "Thou shalt make no graven image;" they felt again the sternness and the indignation of the most High God, who is a Spirit, against the little creatures bowing down before the things which their hands had made. Before we condemn our Puritan fathers, let us understand the inestimable treasure that we have obtained through their violent and excessive protest.

But now, supposing that we in the spirit of the New Testament have scrupulously fenced round the inviolable sphere of the spiritual life ; supposing we have learnt to worship God, who is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth ; supposing that we have learnt to rejoice in our position of reconciliation to God in Christ

Jesus our Lord; supposing that we have learnt to regulate our conduct by the inward voice of the Spirit of God; supposing, in a word, that we are whole-hearted Christians, keeping ourselves from idols and approaching every subject in Christ and through Christ; the question arises, "Has Art a legitimate sphere?" and the answer that I would give is this: "It has a sphere which is not only legitimate, but precious and invaluable." Thus a great Christian artist like Robert Browning will touch Art with the transforming hand of Christ; he will purify and ennoble its function, and he will give it a lofty definition. He says:

Art which I may style the love of loving, rage
Of knowing, seeing, feeling the very truth of things,
For truth's sake, whole and sole, nor any good
truth brings
The knower, seer, feeler, beside.

That is the true tone of the Christian artist. Art for Art's sake! No, for ever no, a formula which is misleading to life

and destructive of Art. No; "Art for truth's sake," that is the formula. Beauty seen and heard and felt, because beauty is, indeed, the reality of things. The artist is a gifted soul who is called to "render visible the Divine, presenting it to the imaginative and intuitive faculty." True and great Art never leaves the eternal Truth, the eternal greatness of the Spirit and of righteousness; it has its Realism, but its realism is the presentation of a beauty which is true though often unperceived, and is never the presentation of the foulness which can be perceived in any gutter or any sewer. It has its Impressionism, its swift vision of a soul that sees at a glance the truth which slower souls see only by degrees. And thus the true and great artist becomes in God's hands a prophet and a revealer: he catches that harmony which we hear only in broken tones; he sees those visions which we perceive in outline only and in transitory glimpses; he catches them

fully modelled, rich in shape and colour. Art has, therefore, a function, which is not only high, but next to the highest, and it has been set down in words by the great Christian poet. When Abt Vogler at the organ has just realised the lofty and beautiful fabric called into being by the sound of his own keys, and has perceived it fade away as the music ceases, he suddenly recognises that this beauty which seemed so brief exists, for God and in God, for ever; he accepts it as the truth revealed to him for the quickening of faith and love.

"Therefore to whom turn I but to Thee, the
ineffable Name ?

Maker and builder Thou of houses not made
with hands !

What ? Have fear of change from Thee, who art
ever the same ?

Doubt that Thy power can fill the heart that
Thy power expands ?

There shall never be one lost good, what was
shall live as before ;

For evil is null, is nought, is silence implying
sound ;

All that was good shall be good, with, for evil,
so much good more,

On earth the broken arcs, in heaven the
perfect round.

All we have willed, or hoped, or dreamed of good
shall exist,

Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty nor
good, nor power,

Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for
the melodist,

When Eternity affirms the conception of an
hour.

The high that proved too high, the heroic for
earth too hard,

The passion that left the ground to lose itself
in the sky,

Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard:
Enough, he heard it once; we shall hear it
too by-and-by."

But viewed in this light, Art, when it is truly Christian, and not Christian in the vulgar sense of choosing Christian subjects because they appeal to the weak sentimentality of untrained souls, and therefore command a higher price in the market—but Art, when it is truly Christian, becomes a dutiful handmaid of God. That noble portrait which has truthfully

presented the idealised face of an actual human being; that faithful landscape which has humbly reproduced the eternal loveliness of green foliage and chequered skies; that exquisite marble which has led our eyes to rest upon the unfallen grandeur of the being who was made in God's image; that building which in its beauty of proportion and chaste appropriateness of decoration seems to shed dignity upon the whole neighbourhood in which it stands; that truth of design and colour which makes the household furniture the happy and harmonious mirror of the ordered lives that are lived amongst it; that poem which has dived into the ocean of things and brought up its pearls embedded in its mother-of-pearl; and one might almost have said, in the happier days of the stage, that noble play which presented the action and interaction of our human life in the purifying light of the creative imagination, and not in the base light of the interested

caterer who wishes only to catch a laugh or a cheer—each of these becomes a delicate organ in God's hands, not only to delight, but to exalt, the creatures whom He has made.

I cannot but think that the light begins to break through upon our problem. The Puritanism of Christianity is no enemy to Art, but only to the misuse and the misplacement of Art. The vandalism of our Puritan fathers was a blind and fierce reaction against a misuse of Art, which had changed it into an idolatry, and a misplacement of Art, which had made it the servant, not of God, but of the devil. Art set in the room of religion ; Art prostituted ; Art in the hands of men who, through and through, are utterly corrupt ; Art in the hands of those who will use its magic power to corrupt and mislead the world, because this foolish world is always ready to pay the highest price to those who will debauch it—Art on these terms may be

dreaded and condemned. But there is an Art of quite another kind, and the Spirit of Christ has taught us to discriminate. That Spirit sits in judgment on all meretricious beauty—beauty which is only beauty to the perverted taste, the beauty of the music-hall and the French novel ; but that same Spirit of Christ sets a seal of approbation upon the beauty that is true beauty, because it is beauty to God, and came from God, and represents God amongst men. And He approves, never doubt it, of those artists who are able, in a measure, to present this godly beauty to us, and to open our eyes to perceive it. And if this distinction which the Christian spirit makes should ever come to be recognised, the artist's function may be again redeemed ; the Royal Academy might cease, but great Art would begin ; the artist once again would, like Bezaleel, be consciously occupying himself in building a beautiful tabernacle for God's self-manifestation, or, like Fra

Angelico, would rise from his knees to paint his fresco or his canvas with tears of unutterable rapture standing in his eyes. And if we are not destined to see that great regeneration of Art, we may, I think, at least live in the spirit of it, and order our lives as Christians as though we lived in happier days that are to come. We can avert our eyes sternly and decisively from all meretricious and un-Christly Art; refuse to be charmed by the charmer, charm he never so wisely; refuse to be dazzled by what is gorgeous and imposing, but is, unhappily, not true. But, at the same time, just in proportion to the depth and sincerity of our Christian spirit, we can eagerly claim and use whatever glory of loveliness God has vouchsafed to manifest to us through the gifted artist-soul for our delight or for our instruction. It is the Spirit of Christ which makes great Art, and it is the Spirit of Christ which can distinguish. Reject what is bad; accept and rejoice in what is good.

V.

CHRIST IN LITERATURE.

CHRIST IN LITERATURE.

Vita sine literis est mors.—ROBERTSON.

THE first century of our era was by no means an unlettered age. Cultivated Romans like Seneca, or Lucan, Pliny, or Suetonius, probably read and wrote as much as cultivated men read and write in England to-day. Josephus, whose *Antiquities* and *Histories* we still read, and the Alexandrian Jew, Philo, are enough to remind us that even in the provincial society of Judaism there was a circle of readers and authors. Yet there is no point in which the contrast between the first century and the nineteenth is more striking than the place that literature takes. Now reading is not confined to a cultivated circle ; it is a universal acquisition. In modern England authorship is

as general as reading was in ancient Rome. Literature has become for us the principal medium of communication between mind and mind; it is the principal instructor to which we look for the progressive education of the race. We are all of us more or less a bookish people, and probably the larger part of what each one of us is has been derived from what we read. This diffused power of literature is, I need hardly remind you, of very modern growth; its origin was in the invention of printing, four hundred years ago, and its stalwart youth to-day is due simply to the cheapening of paper and the improvements in the processes of production. Its future is altogether incalculable. Mark, then, this difference: in the first Christian century literature was a tiny rillet trickling from Helicon, visited by a few scholars and thinkers; to-day literature is a many-branched stream which covers with a network the whole land, so that no one, even the youngest or

the poorest, can be entirely uninfluenced by it.

But this vast change in the habits and the condition of the world necessarily creates a number of problems which could not be alluded to in the New Testament, such problems as these: *How should we read? What should we read? How are we to regard printed matter? What principles should regulate us in the use of it?*

Now it is to be observed that though the Bible can give no direct and explicit answer to these questions, the Bible by its very existence is in a certain sense the suggestion of an answer: for this ancient Book is a proof that from the very beginning God laid claim to the human faculty of reading and writing for His own purposes. When you come to consider how late in time printing was generalised and literature was made common, and when you come to consider how very little the men of the first age

could have dreamt that the men of the latter ages would be bookish people, you must regard it as very remarkable that God from the first said to particular men, to Moses, to Jeremiah, to John, "Write in a book," so that an extensive, although a compact, literature should be formed against the time when men would be readers; and the writings—or, to use the Latin word, the "Scriptures"—should be not only the medium for communicating the truth, but the casket in which the truth should be preserved, an inexhaustible store as the minds of men should open and be able to receive it. What I mean is, the use that God makes of literature, and would make of it, is seen in the place which He has given to the Bible in modern religion. At the present moment you may measure the stage of advancement and civilisation of the several nations of the world by simply discovering how far they know and use this Book. If you take a map of the world and mark by

colours its gradations from civilisation down to barbarism, you will find you have an accurate report of the degree in which each nation knows and uses the Bible. Here in Europe, for example, the vast difference between England, with its freedom and its comparative happiness, and Russia, which is fast bound in misery and iron, may be covered immediately by observing that in England about half our population have a little smattering of Bible knowledge, and all our principal leaders and teachers are suffused with its principles ; while in Russia the great mass of the people have not heard of the Bible, and 90 per cent. could not read it if they had heard about it. Or, if you want an example still more striking, cross the Atlantic, and ask what is the difference between North America and South America. It obviously is not made by the Isthmus of Panama, but it is exactly expressed when you have said that that great progressive community called the

United States was, as it were, built upon the Bible, whilst those confused, corrupt, and anarchic Republics which fill the southern part of the Continent are entirely ignorant of it. What God would do then with literature is, in a certain sense, distinctly marked upon the very face of the earth to-day.

But now will you turn to Rev. i. 11. We find Jesus Christ in this text claiming the pen of a certain man in order that He may communicate with men through ages to come. From the recognition of this fact I want to pass—rather suddenly I know—to a very broad and general statement. Looking at the whole mass of printed and written matter with which the world at the present day teems, and sometimes seems to groan, I propose that we should divide it into two parts, and of the one part we should say: “*This* is such that Christ said, or might have said, about it: ‘Write,’ such as He could approve and use; and *that* is such

that you could not possibly conceive Him saying, either 'Write' or 'read it,' such that it could have no *imprimatur* of His, and stands condemned in the light of His countenance." I am aware that this is a somewhat unusual classification of literature, but it is a very obvious one for a Christian to make, and it at once gives us a principle which we can apply to all our reading. That stern edict of the Caliph Omar, commanding the library at Alexandria to be burnt—because, as he said, "If it contains what is in the Word of God, the Word of God is sufficient, and if it contains what is against it, it ought to be destroyed"—has frequently been censured by thinking men; but the more you look at it the more you see that it deserves censure, not because of the thought that was in the Caliph's mind, but because of the unwarrantable limitation of the idea of the Word of God, the assumption that the Word of God was confined to the Koran. So far from

condemning the Caliph in what he said, I would suggest that we actually take his recommendation, with a little modification, as the principle of modern reading ; we may say, with regard to every book or paper or pamphlet that we wish to read, "Is this a thing about which my Lord might have said 'Write,' or even 'Read' ? Then I propose to read it and understand it to the best of my ability. Is it, on the other hand, a writing of a kind concerning which He would have said neither 'Write' nor 'Read' ? for me it shall be an unwritten book—a blank, illegible paper ; by no means shall my eyes peruse it."

Now, I think that we shall all feel the need of some inward principle for selection and restriction in reading, for these two reasons :—First, consider the penetrating and insidious power of a printed page. Suppose it is bad, suppose it is corrupting ; it comes before us with a quiet, demure, and decent aspect ; nothing

could be less aggressive, less dangerous than this ; it may even be bound in the costliest binding and printed upon the best paper. Who could be distrustful of anything so innocent, or regard with suspicion what seems in no way to threaten our safety ? And yet, when the eye has fallen upon this innocent page, immediately the whole course of nature may be set on fire and the stream of devastating lava may rush over the fair fields of the mind ; or if it be of another quality, unspeakable floods of defiling mud may arise and creep over the soul, leaving, even if they should withdraw, patches and stains as long as the soul exists. Now, if a living companion approached us with the same corrupt influences in him as are contained in this innocent page, every decent mind would keep him at a distance, and would insist upon some satisfactory introduction. He would give, more or less, an indication of what he is, and as we got to see what he was we should

decline his acquaintance. But this companion, this written page, leaps into the breast at a bound ; it is there at once unquestioned and uncensured ; it is like that wooden horse which was introduced into Troy with the approbation of all the people, containing within its belly the armed men that were to be the ruin of the city, but not disgorging itself until it was well within the walls. This evil page comes as quietly as the wooden horse, and it does not tell you what it means to do until it is inside. I think your experience will bear me out when I say that there are multitudes of ruined lives in the visible prisons and slums of this city, and still more in that invisible prison and slum which we call hell, who date their fall from the perusal of a trashy book or a piece of writing of more calculated uncleanness. Consider that.

But, on the other hand, suppose that the writing be good, consider what a

winged and miraculous power this written thing possesses. It can fly where no human voice can reach it, can arrest and hold a man whom no human hand can touch, and when it has laid its spell upon him it will be like a two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing of the bone and of the marrow. I suppose that the greater part of us date all our more important growths in goodness and truth from some good book, some good pamphlet, some good paper that we read. Nay, I venture to think that if we could by divine insight determine which are Christians and which are not, the majority of real Christians would say that they first found Christ through something which they read, and not through anything which they heard. The Press is a great pulpit to-day, the greatest of pulpits. Those who have learnt to write at the bidding of Jesus reach a wider audience than could ever be assembled in St. Paul's or the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Just to

illustrate this. I received, a few weeks ago, a letter from a man in one of our Australian Colonies. It seems that a friend had put into his hands a copy of *The Christian World*, because it contained an account of Mr. Barnum's religious opinions; but my correspondent, as it chanced, read in another column a brief report of a sermon which I had preached in this pulpit. And it happened in God's providence that this sermon came to him at a crisis of his life as a veritable message from God, and though I was unknown to him, he unknown to me felt constrained to send a letter from the other side of the world, on the bare chance of its reaching me, in order to express his gratitude. When you see this power of the printed page penetrating and insidious and far-reaching all the world over, is it not evident that you want some principle to determine which things you will read, to examine each thing which comes before you claiming to be

read, discriminating which is fit to come into your company, and what shall by no means and on no conditions gain admission?

But, indeed, the other reason for a principle of selection arises from the simple fact that the printed literature of the world is so vast. None of us can read everything. My experience of people who are said to read everything is not very favourable. An omnivorous reader always seems to me very much like a room which is used for a dustbin and a larder at one and the same time. A man who has not learned the art of discrimination in reading will be very likely to see books and papers pass before him in an endless kaleidoscope of changing interest, but he will never see the firm, strong palace of truth rising before his eyes. None of us can read everything; and is it not, therefore, best to make up our mind that we will read all that is good?

and if we go upon that principle we shall not have time to read anything that is bad.

But the principle of which I have been speaking to-night is a little more specific, that we read only that of which Christ has said, "Write," and refuse all the rest. Now, is it possible that some of you are afraid that in adopting this principle you would restrict your reading within very narrow limits, and is it possible, too, that some of you say, "How are we to know which things are in accordance with the literary censorship of Jesus Christ?" Let me, in closing, point out that you need not be troubled by the narrowness of the literature that is thus suggested, and, secondly, that there is a very easy way of knowing which literature Christ approves. A good critic knows the mark of any well-known writer before he has gone half-way down the first page, and a good Christian seldom has to read more than two or three sentences before dis-

covering whether that is a piece of Christ's literature or not.

But in this matter of determining, I frankly admit that if you adopt my principle you will not always be in the fashion. It is no part of the Christian's duty to read a book because it happens to be in vogue. It is not enough for him to be told that the book has made a stir, he must wait and see what kind of a stir it has made. It may be a stir in the devil's own cauldron, and yet all the reviewers will be praising it and all society talking about it. I recognise no claim of a book to be read because it is the book of the season; you have to wait to know whether Christ said "Write" or not.

Again, if you adopt this principle, you will not find it necessary to read through your daily paper: you will read, perhaps, a good deal less of the daily papers than most people do read. There are certain parts of the daily paper which no con-

sideration would induce me to read ; the loathsome details of law courts may be very profitably submitted to the eyes of lawyers and of God, but there is no necessity for submitting them to your eyes and mine. The editors and publishers of the daily papers have, no doubt, an explanation for publishing these things *in extenso* which they mean to give when they appear before the Judgment-seat of God, and people so able as editors must, of course, know that the plea of enlarging their circulation will appear very ridiculous before the Throne ; but granted that they have an explanation to present, you and I have no explanation for reading these things. Earnest men in an earnest world cannot possibly have time to read them. They tell me how men are overworked to-day, but I should believe it more if I found that they could not read the reports of the law courts. But as long as men are able to read these disgusting and unnecessary details, the

only sense in which they are overworked is the horrible sense of being overworked by their master the devil. I cannot understand a man having time to read these things ; I cannot understand him, if he had the whole of eternity before him in this universe of God, having time to read them.

But I said that the literature to be read on this principle is not limited, as some people suppose. Let me tell you what it is. There is the Bible, to begin with. You will find men who have been as hard students studying it for fifty years telling us that there is a great deal more to be found in it than they have yet discovered. There is another branch of literature that has to be read by Christians, the reports of the progress of the Master's kingdom, the news which comes from the front of the Lord's battle in the world. Then, leaving the Bible and the reports of the Master's kingdom, there is the noble pile of books on Science, and I

wonder if it has occurred to us all that if, as the Bible teaches us, Jesus Christ is the creator of this universe, every true fact about this universe is a record of Jesus Christ's handiwork; and, considering the incalculable mass of scientific detail to-day, no one can say that the literature is limited. Then there are all the accredited records of human history—an almost unlimited sphere of reading. Then, again, there are the poets—not all the poets, nor all of any poet, but you may mark this, that no poet of the first rank ever wrote but, when he gets into the higher region of his thought and utterance, he has become a mouthpiece of God. From Homer down to the poets of the present day, the great poetic utterances are God's speech to the world. Then there are all the wise, true masters of thought in this age and ages that have gone by, so numerous, so great, and some of them even so voluminous that we are never likely to finish

them ; and then there are all the stories—I dare not call them novels, for the name has been abused—but all the stories that have come from the pure and purifying imagination of great writers and thinkers, the mass of which very few of us have read, and, considering that they are unread, one sometimes wonders how people to-day find time to read stories of another kind. Now I shall say nothing about sermons and directly religious literature, for that might seem, coming from this quarter, a little too professional, but I know some people who would be better if they read even sermons, and I think there are certain departments of religious literature unknown to religious people, which yet are full of Divine teaching and Divine stimulus.

Now, I do earnestly recommend to you this principle of reading on which I have been dwelling ; but I still have to deal with the possibility of some one saying, “I do not know in all this mass of

literature which Christ approves, and which He does not approve." What does that mean? I hope it does not sound censorious, but I fear it means that those who make the objection do not really know Christ. He must be merely a name to them—a tradition. It seems to show that they do not know Him personally ; that they have no contact with Him, that there are no passages between their souls and His. Does it not mean that? I cannot understand any one who knows Christ being in any doubt as to the kind of books Christ approves, or reading from any book or paper without knowing immediately where to stop ; and if it means, therefore, that you do not know Christ, dear readers of multitudinous books and papers, I would earnestly ask you whether it is not worth while to stop reading for a time, and find out Him. Lay aside the books and the papers, and go straight to Him, make your way through all

opposing obstacles until you have come into personal touch with Him, until your life and will and heart, and all that is within you, has been brought into subjection to His most holy purpose and thought. When you have touched Him, and learned to know Him, then all other things become easy, the guidance is clear, and His voice speaks when all human voices are silent. But without knowing Him, indeed, we are left without our guide, philosopher, and friend, we are left in the school of Books without a master, and we are likely to swallow more garbage than good food simply for want of Divine direction. Come to Him. I suppose it does not occur to every one that coming to Christ is so practical as this. You understand, perhaps, if it is said come to Him in order that you may enter heaven; but I say, come to Him in order that you may know what to read and how to escape the defilement and the destruction which lie lurking even in the

printed pages of books and newspapers. Come to Him. Nothing but living touch with Jesus Christ is a sufficient guide for what we are to read and what we are to write. May God bring us all to Him—the supreme Author of all good books, the supreme Teacher of all true lessons!

VI.

**THE CHRISTIAN AND
AMUSEMENT.**

THE CHRISTIAN AND AMUSE- MENT.

“Bodily exercise is profitable for a little.”

1 TIM. iv. 8.

THERE is a story coming down to us from the earliest Christian times which tells how a young hunter at Ephesus, returning from the chase with an unstrung bow in his hand, entered the house of St. John and found him engaged in playing with a tame dove. The young man showed some astonishment that the Apostle should be so lightly employed, but St. John, looking gently at him, asked why he carried the bow unstrung in his hand. He answered: “In order that the bow may retain its elasticity.” “Just so,” said St. John, “mind and body will not retain their elasticity or usefulness unless they are at times un-

strung ; prolonged tension destroys their power." We might almost wish that this story had occurred in the canonical writings, for the question of amusements is one upon which we all of us at times feel we sorely need direction. But the New Testament gives no instance of the Lord, or any of His apostles, taking any recreation at all, unless we may quote those feasts and dinners at which we occasionally find Him present. The New Testament gives no instruction or precept upon this very practical question, unless we may draw in the text that I have just read, and treat it as a special instance leading to a general conclusion ; the text teaches that bodily exercise, which is one form of amusement, is very good in its way, but the text almost immediately puts it in contrast with godliness, which is good in that it is always profitable, for this life and for that which is to come.

But perhaps from the very silence of the

New Testament upon this practical question we may draw a very useful lesson. The Spirit of Christ is very averse to casuistry—that system of morals which seeks to enforce duty by minute analysis of every conceivable course of conduct. Judaism had fallen into casuistry; casuistry was the very essence of Jesuitism; but Jesus Christ and His Spirit are opposed to casuistry; it is the thought of Christ to go straight to the roots of things, and to insist upon some great and simple principle. It says that we are to love our God with all our heart and our neighbours in the same way, and then it leaves the practical details of life to be determined by the fulfilment of these general principles. This New Testament law seems always to be saying, “Love God, love Him with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength, and love your neighbour as yourself, and then you will find that a kind of instinct tells you which kinds of

amusement will be hurtful ; and also you will find ”—of course this is not what the New Testament says, but it seems to imply it—“ that for love’s sake you are bound to use every form of recreation, which will make or keep you a strong, wholesome, and energetic person, ready to do God’s will upon earth, and to serve men for God’s sake.”

I say we may draw this kind of lesson from the New Testament’s silence upon the subject, and if we are justified in drawing it, we shall certainly be very cautious in passing judgment upon other people, and we shall avoid that fatal mistake into which preachers, as well as others, are apt to fall, of making one list of amusements which are lawful and another list of amusements which are not lawful, and insisting on all right-minded persons accepting one and avoiding the other. If in the course of what I say to you there seems to be any judgment passed upon particular amusements, I would ask you from the

beginning to understand that there is no finality in such judgment ; my purpose is simply to stimulate the individual conscience, and to get every intelligent person to apply the touchstone for himself. If I pass judgment upon any form of amusement you must only accept it as the conclusion at which one Christian conscience has arrived which humbly hopes and tries to obey the Master.

To begin with, we may take it for granted, as the story about St. John has just shown us, that some kind of recreation is absolutely necessary for our mind and body ; the hard toil of daily life wears down the spirit and exhausts the energies. We are like the plot of grass, which may be none the worse or even much the better when it is trodden on only occasionally, so that a chance is offered meantime for the young blade to spring up afresh, but if it is trodden on continually, without any cessation and by great multitudes, the turf quickly becomes either

bare ground or slippery mud. That is a very fair simile of the human mind; it can bear a good deal of work, but give it too much and you destroy it. If our work is mental we absolutely need recreation, fresh air, and exercise. The mind must be diverted, or, according to the old English meaning of the word, *amused*.* If our work is not so much mental as physical, then we need recreation by the employment of the mind, and unless with the rest of the body there comes some recreation of the mind you will find that physical labour leads to the complete degeneration of manhood.

But the very fact that we speak of amusement or recreation in this way calls our attention, in the second place, to the fact that amusement is simply a counterpart of work. It presupposes that we have been working, and there is no such thing as legitimate amusement which is

* See the article on Amusement in Dr. Murray's new Dictionary.

not a relief from toil or a preparation for fresh toil. With people, whether men or women, or even children, whose whole life is a search for amusement, you and I, I trust, have nothing whatever to do. The Lord Jesus Christ has once for all described the result of such a life in the familiar story of the man who fared sumptuously every day and was clothed in purple and fine linen, and found as life went on that he lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torment. That is an issue which, so far as we know, cannot possibly be avoided when a life is spent simply for amusement. A youth just escaped from school, or any other restraint, can go through a tolerably long period of continuous amusement with some kind of pleasure and result, but let that be continued for a few months, or even for a few weeks, and it begins to pall; there is a lagging and a weariness in the amusement itself; and let it be continued for a few years without any honest, earnest,

serious work, even to fill in the intervals, and you will observe that this bright young life is passing into the condition that Jesus Christ describes: very soon you will observe the slow fires of hell beginning to be lit, and the torture engines coming into operation, and the worm gnawing at the heart. If this world is not a great busy, serious workshop, if each one of us is not glad to work while it is day, for the night comes when no man can work, if there be any person or persons who can legitimately spend their life in the search for amusement, like butterflies gaily dancing in the sun and sipping at every flower, I have nothing more to say. All the amusements of which I can speak are the amusements of earnest men, the amusements of those who can understand the significance of life, and are amongst the honest toilers of the world.

Now, coming to look at the amusements and recreations of busy and useful

men, we may, of course, at once dismiss from our attention all that are essentially vicious ; we can at once dismiss, for example, such amusement as some curiously constituted people discover in over-eating and over-drinking ; we can dismiss those amusements which are found in the illicit indulgence of sensual passion ; we can dismiss all amusement which consists in demoralising games such as gambling ; we can dismiss all sports which involve cruelty to men or to animals ; without further consideration we can dismiss all forms or circles of human society which we inwardly know to be incompatible with the life of a Christian, and we can dismiss the foolish talking and ribaldry which St. Paul, in Ephesians v. 6, classes amongst things “not convenient.” We as Christians are only concerned with those amusements and recreations which do not stand, on the very face of them, condemned. And perhaps it will be convenient if we classify them in this way :—

There are, *first* of all, the forms of study or work which, being in contrast to our regular employment, afford genuine recreation, and for people of abounding vitality such recreations are generally found to be the most effectual. But, *secondly*, there are all those wholesome games and sports which are peculiarly attractive to us while youthful blood is tingling in our veins. *Thirdly*, there are those entertainments which are provided, in public or private, by the professional purveyors of amusement. And, *fourthly*, there are the various forms of social intercourse, affording every variety of recreation and mental and physical improvement.

Now I should like to say, looking at this general field of amusement, that far more of them are innocent than many people, and especially good people, are disposed to admit. A great many are condemned by mere prejudice or by a confusion of thought which identifies the

thing itself with some accidents of mode or quantity or accompaniment which are connected with it. And this observation leads me to fix one of the two principles which I want to suggest to young people who wish to order their lives aright in the spirit of the Master, as guiding thoughts in the matter of amusements. This is the principle that I wish to fix—it is not always, or even often, a question of determining whether the amusement is legitimate in itself, *but it is almost always a question of finding out whether it is legitimate for me and legitimate under the circumstances in which I am placed, or of finding out whether I can enjoy it with the moderation which is according to knowledge.* For instance, the most innocent amusement in the world becomes wrong if it prevents us from doing the least of our duties ; the entertainment which has not a single feature of objection in it may become absolutely bad if it makes

us the next morning unable to rise and pray and begin the day in the freshness of God's presence. There is nothing more wholesome than a game of football for young men in the prime of life, but if the fierce physical excitement unfits him for the next day's duties or wears upon the spiritual, and makes him too much of the mere animal; if, as in the north of England, the passion for football becomes the ruin of the Sunday-school, and disinclines the young man to study the Bible, or discover the ways of life, then this perfectly innocent and laudable game of football may become as mischievous as the dancing saloon or the Grand Stand at Ascot. There is nothing more suitable or even helpful for us than human society: we none of us become all we were meant to be until we have mingled in society, and there is no blame attaching to any of us if we seek to enter the very best society that is open to us, always provided you know the meaning

and the nature of the word "best"; but supposing we find, in the society which we suppose to be the best, that we are becoming more and more insincere and superficial, more and more cynical, more and more incredulous of human worth, less able to show love to God and love to man; or supposing even that the attractions of society begin to rob us of the time which we might give to good work or to good worship, and the cultivation of the inner man, which is the one essential thing, then this society, in itself so perfectly innocent and laudable, may become as dangerous to us as the music-hall or the gaming-table, which we generally condemn. That is the difficulty, you see. Amusement is like a medicine which in very small doses serves as an excellent tonic, but taken in large doses is a desperate poison; and it is like a medicine, too, which may be given to one man with the best results, and given in the same proportion to another man with ruinous

results. It is then quite misleading to say, as a rule, "This amusement is right or this amusement is wrong": it is almost always a question whether it is right for me or right for you, whether it is right for us under the existing circumstances, and taking into account the other conditions of our life, and, therefore, instead of going to a list of amusements to see which are right and which are wrong, it is imperative that you and I go to God Himself, and learn from the Lord Jesus our Guide, our Master, and our Friend, what is right for us, and right for us now, and what is wrong for us, and wrong for us now.

The other of the two principles which I should like to present to you is one that is, I am afraid, far too frequently overlooked. It is this—an amusement may be quite harmless to us, and yet purchased by the injury, or even the irreparable ruin, of the people who provide it for us. A Christian cannot

possibly enjoy a pleasure which brings spiritual or moral ruin to any of his fellow creatures. If, for example—and of course it is in the matter of public entertainments that this principle comes chiefly into play—he wishes to go to a public entertainment, it is by no means enough for him to say that it does him no harm, or even that it does him good ; there is a question lying behind ; he has the sacred duty laid upon him to discover whether the entertainment which he enjoys is doing harm to those who give it. Now some of us were told a little while ago of a certain actor who said, with terrible emphasis, pointing to the curtain on the stage, “*Behind that is Gomorrha,*” and we were told at the same time of another man whose duty it was to secure little children for a Christmas pantomime, and when a person standing by suggested that his own two little children, who were very beautiful, would serve the purpose well, he quickly and even

angrily answered, "I would rather see them dead before my eyes." Now, I am not at all in a position to determine how far the implications in these remarks may be correct, and as I personally do not go to theatres I am under no obligation to settle this very vital question. But if you do go to theatres, if you are Christian men and women and enjoy that kind of entertainment, you will at once perceive that it is an absolutely essential duty for you to determine whether the entertainment given on the stage is working for the injury of those who give it. It will not be at all enough, when you come to add up the account of your life, to say that you consistently received pleasure and even good from these public entertainments, if it is discovered that they were purchased at the price of degraded men, corrupt women and ruined children; it will not be at all enough for you to say "We did not know": the plea of ignorance is never admissible

when it was our duty to know, for God's complaint against His people has always been "They do not know, they do not consider; they are so careless, they are so indifferent, or they say they are not their brother's keeper when they are; and they march over the fallen souls of their brethren for their amusement or their profit, and come before My throne and plead they did not know."

Now these two simple principles must suffice; I hope they may be of some practical guidance to those young men and women—by far the majority, I believe, of all young men and women—who honestly in their heart wish to be right, who do not plunge into sin because they want it, but because they slip unwittingly. But I have one other thing to say to you young men and women before I close. I want to suggest to you that surely for the real Christian, whose heart is full of the love of God, there are within the Christian Church itself most genuine and

lasting means of recreation, and even amusement. My text adds, "Godliness is profitable for the life which now is," and among other things godliness affords a fund of physical health and mental recreation which I think some of us have scarcely yet realised. Let me put it to you in this way. The simple and unselfish attempt to make some other lives brighter and better than they are, the intercourse with happy Christian workers, the fellowship in the service of man and in the worship of God—that happy mood of spiritual exaltation which the Apostle has described as "singing and making melody in the heart unto the Lord;" these things, if you only knew it, offer a great deal more refreshment for jaded minds and exhausted bodies than most of the so-called amusements which are sought at great expense and with infinite disappointment. It has sometimes seemed to me that possibly the New Testament is silent upon this most vital question of re-

creation because the church society which it depicts and holds up to men as the ideal of human life is in itself a complete and satisfying recreation. The *agapé*, which is the centre of the New Testament church life, with its social joy, its feasts, its prayer, its bright and thrilling songs, and that living manifestation of God which will always make men glad, this *agapé*, this life on the higher plane, this life of the closer brotherhood, this life of the realised Fatherhood, this life of the cleansed heart and the happiness which flows from that which is pure, this life is certainly present and open to you young men and young women; and I sometimes think that if you were only more ready to avail yourself of it; if you only understood a little the secret of it; if you only saw what God meant for you, you would be less exercised in securing amusement of another kind: you would be able to say, what I for instance am able to say, that for many years past I

have never known what it was to be dull, and have never longed for any exciting recreation, for life seemed to be too beautiful, too sweet, too refreshing, and the fulness of this life in Jesus Christ our Lord, the perfectness of this wide brotherhood of Christian souls, the interests of those that are around us, the love and affection which they always offer as a rich reward of the most trifling service—these things are better, so far as I can judge from the result, both to recreate the mind and the body, than the things which London has laboriously provided for her overworked and wearied citizens.

I would ask you to reflect upon this in no narrow spirit, for I think I have shown you to-night that I am not in the least afraid of the whole range of legitimate amusements, which are too frequently condemned; yet I would ask you to consider that if you want a sound body and a sound mind, if you want a manhood always growing richer, fuller,

and truer ; if you want a womanhood that becomes as age draws on Divine, prophetic, and inspired, you must choose your life not along the lines of so-called worldly recreations and amusements, but along the line of the Divine thought—the recreation that God designs for His children, who are indeed His sons and His daughters and can only be wholesome and happy when they live from day to day in the consciousness of their sonship and their daughterhood.

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